wordeater

52

wordeater 52 staff:

Judy Belfield, Shelbia Chandler, Dan Druszkowski, Jerry Frazier, Judy Lake, Robin McWilliams, John Stobart

To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the seven people on the staff had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

PROSE

$25 to Shelbia Chandler

POETRY

$25 to Dawn Christman

COVERS

Artists whose cover designs are accepted for an issue are usually awarded $10 each for front and back covers, or a total of $20. Nobody submitted any cover designs for this issue, but, as luck would have it, Loudmouth McKracken, WORDEATER's mascot, found these covers floating in a breeze near the tennis courts. Evidently, some anonymous, artistic squirrel or robin had been anticipating our dilemma. Thanks, Anonymous Fauna, but we can't give cash to non-humans.

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Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 53 must be submitted to John Stobart in room C-1069 by:

September 20, 1985

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

September 20, 1985
November 22, 1985

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W. A. Kahle

ORIGINALITY PLEASE

Sing me a song
one with dust on it
to spark the reminiscences
of fading wishes.
I need imitation to cure my psyche--
its aged promises so dated,
archaic.
Tell me a joke
one laced with dirt
to purify the mold
clogging the humor.
I starve for a passage into
jovial lands--
they can concoct a legitimate tale.
Tell me a story
one with expression
to annihilate the tedium
corroding our lives.
Hunting for differences,
always objective, yet often graphic:
examine the core.

****

Judy Belfield

GRUDGE d'ART

I haven't used my iron in years
but last week
I bought a Rubbermaid Iron Caddy
so I could store the ironing board
and the iron
on a wall behind a door--
it peeks out about five inches
so that every time I pass
I am reminded of those ancient days
before perma-press
before the revolution
when "sprinkling the clothes"
was a weekly phrase
when the whole ironing scene
wanted only thick chains
and a time-keeper
to meter the strokes.
Like other instruments of torture
irons must be artifacts preserved
and put on display
so no one ever forgets.

****

Dawn Christman

PINK SMILES

I walked into a gallery today
saw Monet's water lilies
flushed pink
smiled at me
and I smiled back
Roses and pinks
and peaches
flowed
off the canvas
hitched a ride
on waves of light
and reflected,
into my eyes
Visions of peace
flowers
entered me
I stood there
looking
feeling the beauty
and wondered
if Monet was smiling.

****

Shelbia Chandler

IF ONLY LIFE COULD BE

If only life could be
Like it was when I was five
And all I had was leisure time
To grow and to thrive

And even when I reached
The ripe old age of six,
I never had a problem
That mama couldn't fix.

Things stayed this way
For five more years
Mama always nearby
To dry all my tears

But then one day it happened
I noticed something strange
The world around me
Was beginning to change

"You're growing up,"
My Mama said
"It's time you learned
To use your own head."

So now if I'm down
Depressed and blue
And I turn to Mama
Saying, "What should I do?"

She'll say, "You're a woman,
Almost twenty-two
The decisions now
Are up to you."

I find it little comfort
And deep inside I cry
Why did it have to change
Mama, why why why!

Why can't life be like
It was when I was a kid
When I thought Mama could fix
anything
And usually Mama did.

****

Judy Belfield

DADDYS

She was going to marry
her daddy she said
when she grew up
I said I'd have to find mine
before I could marry him
but I didn't think I would
he'd just make another baby
and run away again
She asked why my daddy
ran away
did he join the circus
Silly, I said giggling,
daddys don't join circuses
and we laughed and laughed
Mona, I said
is it okay
if I marry your daddy

****

Judy Belfield

SPACE

My love is hidden
in the heart of a star.
On clear nights, earthbound,
I watch it sparkle,
remember phrases from songs--
the old yearning comes home
to shake loose the tight coil
of my complacency.
Words to describe this unrest
profane the feeling,
give it a solidity
it never had--
this is why
I hide my love
where I can always find it
light-years away.

****

Judy Belfield

SEGMENTS

Grampa goes to work
every morning in his bedroom--
he takes his bed apart
to examine the quality of the wood,
disassembles the lock on his door
to inspect the craftsmanship.
One day, he disconnected the pipes
in his bathroom;
another day, he worked on
the electrical fixtures.
Grampa seems to feel a need
these days
to dismember things
scrutinize their parts.
His own fragmented mind
skips from yesterday to yesterday
without blueprint or rhyme;
he lives in segments
like the pieces of his bed
he forgets to put back together.

****

Dawn Christman

CERAMIC SEAGULLS

Ceramic seagulls
poised on the dock
teetering from the
salty air
that waters their eyes
They're crying
in the midst of
heather blue sky
Shells so fragile
weaved with
lines and cracks
Like people, they
sometimes break

****

Mike Troyer

THE CENTER OF ALL THINGS

I have often been in a public area at a time I wished to be alone. This conflict has led me to find the most isolated area as quickly as possible. It may be surprising that these searches have often ended successfully at a spot not far from the geographic center of the area.

Take, for example, Joliet Junior College. If one includes the area inside the looping road connecting the north and south entrances, the center of the campus would be somewhere around the flag pole. Yet the little patch of woods next to the flag pole is among the least frequently visited spots on the campus. Once the trees and bushes leaf out, it even becomes very difficult to see into this area from one of the more heavily traveled areas, the bridge. With the foliage in full force, this area can only be observed from the cafeteria. Indeed, this area would seem to be one of the more relaxing places to be alone and and insure one's solitude.

I have found many such examples. Camp Stanley, an Army base in South Korea to which I was assigned, was another. The mile-square camp was on the lower slopes of a rather large foothill. This foothill was so large, in fact, that everybody not familiar with the Rockies called it a mountain, and even those from the Rockies referred to the foothill as a mountain to establish their common reference.

The post was positioned on the south side of the mountain and dropped 150 feet from the higher north fence to the lower south fence three- quarters of a mile away. The post was almost bisected by an east-west road. The road had almost no shoulders since the mountain slope rose sharply to the

(continued)

north and fell just as sharply to the south. The only place that had the same elevation as the road was a building called the Rec Center about halfway along its length.

The slope picked up again on the south side of the Rec Center. This slope offered the most secluded area within the fences bordering the post. There was a row of trees growing about halfway down the slope, which leveled out after about fifty feet into the very back of some companies' motor pools. A small ledge, about four feet wide and six feet from the start of the slope offered comfortable, secure support, and hid whoever was sitting there from sight from the Rec Center and road. The trees filtered any sight from the rarely-visited areas of the motor pools, and those that did venture into the back of their motor pools seldom looked up at sharp enough angle to see the ledge. To my knowledge, I was the only person who knew of that ledge at all.

Another good example of centrally-located solitude was at Fort Riley, Kansas. The primary billeting over there was called "The Hill." It was arranged in a semi-circle about two miles in diameter and housed over twenty-thousand soldiers. The central area of this huge semi-circle was a field which contained a golf course, four or five softball diamonds, two parade fields, a theater, a bowling alley, a gymnasium, and the Enlisted Club. These facilities were all near the inner of two circular roads surrounding the field, leaving the main portion of the interior to various grasses and trees. Almost in the dead center of this huge circle was a clump of trees growing around some concrete blocks. These trees, a quarter-mile from the nearest building, offered complete protection from sight from any of the buildings or rec-fields surrounding it. A smallish hollow in this clump was an excellent place to relax in solitude.

I have only listed some of the more obvious and easily-described areas which share this curious, seemingly contradictory trait. But there are many other examples in this world. Most of the time, though, they go undiscovered--simply because they are so isolated. Next time you're in a public place, find its geographic center, and maybe you'll find yourself cut off from the hubbub around you.

****

Judy Belfield

PHENOMENON

Some days, the thing is there
all over your face . . .

You look the same,
I say, as any other day
so what is it--
the thing that's there
some days
that reaches through my skin
and slaps my nerves senseless?

****

Judy Belfield

KNOWING

I touch the skull
of Peking man:
it speaks of early sunrises
and melting glaciers
oozing primeval life
into the soup of today.
Confusion about origins
is compounded by thought;
the hows and whys
burrow deeper
as layer upon layer of logic
settles on their bones.
The answers giggle to themselves;
solutions lying in such simple dust--
knowing is only as distant
as fingers.

****

Shelbia Chandler

SUMMER SUNDAY

The young woman shivered, clutching a blanketed burden to her breast. The old security guard shifted his feet, eying her warily. Long auburn hair fanned around her tear-stained face, but she wasn't crying now. Her flashing green eyes met his old blue ones as she backed into the corner. In thirty years, he had never encountered such a situation. He didn't know what to do.

She rearranged her burden and began to speak.

"I always wanted a baby, you know. Even when I was just a little girl I did. For a long time it seemed impossible, but now I got Precious and I'm so happy I'm flyin. I'd do anything for my Precious."

She crooned to Precious. The guard watched her over his shoulder as he walked across the deserted lobby and picked up the phone. She didn't seem to notice as he made his call, but when he replaced the receiver shresumed speaking.

"I got pregnant when I was fifteen; I was so happy. I was dealing with this black dude, you know. My mother had fits, but I didn't care. He was older and such a stud. I mean, a real live sex machine!"

(continued)

The security guard grimaced and ran a hand through his sparse hair. The perpetual generation gap question showed in his eyes, but he was hesitant to speak. Immune to his silent disapproval, she continued.

"He had to leave me, though. He got on the wrong side of some cops, and they sent him to prison. I was devastated til I found out I was pregnant. It helped a lot. Mike, he was happy too. He got killed in a riot or something. Anyway, at almost five months, I miscarried. Stress, they said, combined with a kidney problem. Mom was kinda pleased but I was hurt. It was a big loss.

The guard shuffled his feet. She was crying now. Silent tears added new streaks to those already present. He watched a big teardrop land on her bundle. She clutched it even tighter and continued almost to herself.

"When I was almost seventeen, I fell in love with another black dude. They called him Dizz. We were going to get married and have a dozen babies, but I ruined it. One night a little too much booze, a joint or so too many--I get knocked up by this drip named Larry. That sent me for a loop. I had no choice. I had an abortion. Dizz found out and he ditched me. I cried for a week. No Dizz and no baby. What a trip!"

The guard's eyes popped while his jaw made a bee line for his toes. Time stood still, he thought, as he glanced at his watch. He didn't want to be here listening to some girl prattle on about her wild promiscuous life. Thirty placed years, and then this.

The girl's eyes had an almost hypnotic effect on him.

She was in a trans-like state herself when she stopped speaking long enough to mechanically unbutton her blouse exposing bare breasts. Her eyes never left his while she manuevered Precious toward one and went on with her story.

"After that, came Steve. He was okay, but definitely not Dizz. Black guys make sex an art, you know. Steve was cute, but white and straight-laced as they come. I married him, but I didn't love him. I liked him, though, and wanted to have babies. I ditched him three years later, after I found out he was sterile. That was a bitch. So I said, Goodbye Steve."

She removed Precious from her breast and awkwardly rebuttoned her blouse. The guard watched in flabberghasted silence. His face alternated between deep red and dead white. His hand frequently made paths through his hair.

"Elroy was my main man. I met him after Steve. He was half and half. I really went for him. I thought everything was cool, but he left me after six months for this black chick named Jackie. That hurt, but I didn't worry. You see, by then, I was pregnant again.

That was when I had the car accident. A drunk plowed into us. Mom was killed, but I barely got a scratch. They said I lost my baby."

The guard was worried. Her voice seemed hysterical. He looked at his watch again, hoping her talk would end soon.

"They said my baby was dead. They said complications prevented more children. No more babies because of internal damage by the accident and the abortion."

Her voice had risen. She was sobbing loudly, forcing her words through the sobs. The guard was frightened.

"They lied! I got Precious. You see? Precious? Say hello to the nice man, Precious."

She clutched Precious tightly to her chest, chaking violently.

"Precious is so cold," she said. "I've got to warm him up. He hasn't moved in hours. He's so cold."

She kicked the gas can near her feet over. The stench of gasoline filled the lobby while gasoline soaked the carpet. The guard inched toward her as she rummaged in her pocket for a match. He was prepared to lunge if she found one, but he was afraid. He was only an old man, while she was young and crazy. He knew his number could be up.

She was still looking when the men came in. One blond and burly, the other a freckled redhead. She looked up, her own hair catching the light. She smiled.

"I forgot my damn matches. Either of you guys got one? I've got to light a fire for Precious. He's so cold. I'd do anything for Precious, you know."

The redhead smiled at her. "You don't have to worry. Me and my partner will take care of you and Precious."

He took her arm and began to lead her away. She walked five steps and froze. Realization hit her and she began to struggle wildly. Precious slipped from her grip and landed on the gasoline-soaked carpet. She screamed.

"You killed Precious. Look what you did to my baby. Look what you did," she sobbed.

The man led her away. His partner placed a supporting arm around the old guard's shoulders. They both looked at the bundle. Precious was a dead cat. A bloody mangled mess that she must have scraped off some street.

They turned and walked from the deserted office building. The guard breathed in fresh air as the hot July sun beat down on his brow.

"Thirty years," he muttered. "Thirty years and this is what I get. An empty office building on a hot Sunday afternoon, a crazy girl, and a dead cat!"

He shook his head in bewilderment as the blond joined his partner. The guard looked after the ambulance when they drove away.

****

Judy Belfield

PICNIC

One day in summer
we made salami sandwiches
with mustard
and cut huge hunks of yellow cake
We wrapped them all
in wax paper carefully
and placed them in a box.
There was no room
for the bottle of chocolate milk;
you carried it in your small hands
from the kitchen to the back yard.
We could have picnicked
on the front porch
but where was the adventure--
the grass, the weeds, the gnats
and the hot sun?
You tripped and dropped the bottle
cut your finger--
an element of horror
introduced into my pastoral plans.
The blood wouldn't stop.
Next day, you showed me the stitches
three of them
black-laced
holding you together.
I felt sick
thinking of the needle
piercing your skin
thinking of the chocolate milk
stained with blood.
You said I was more upset
about the chocolate milk
than I was about your finger.
I was.
There are not stitches
for disappointment.

****

Dawn Christman

ITS BEAUTY

Its beauty,
like a rose
captivated him
almost sinful
he worshipped her
with the love
of a gullible
sailor
serenaded her
on chilly nights
comforted her
uneasiness
in storms
Passionate
love with her
was imagined
in the catacombs
of darkness

On a cool, clean night
in audience
with the stars
he jumped
into her waiting arms.
She tossed and
rolled him about
under the
murky surface
said she had
too many lovers
already.

****

Judy Belfield

GRAPE SUMMER

Grape summer
fattening like baby thighs--
deep as Mata Hari's eyes
all khol smudged
and pudgy.
I stand too far away--
a spectator at the zoo
choosing panthers and wolves
from the guide,
pointing out their places
on the map:
We will stop here
then here
and then, time
to go home
to dream of claws
and poor Red Riding Hood.
Just so, I dream
of amethyst heat
never once dipping my finger
in its juice.
Life is like this, I say,
a secondhand experience
we see through other eyes;
to get close, to taste
to smell, to feel,
only turns itself back
like guns on shelves
bought for protection
shattering the skulls
of five-year-old cowboys.

****

W. Al Kahle

CONCENTRATION ON CONSERVATION

Laugh at me
unmercifully--
call me the
joke of the
decade.
Cackles and rasps
die fast--
pain and frustrations
remain.
Life is a cycle--
changing with motions,
so the blood
in my veins prove.

Damnations
are common:
Assaults of the
tender individual.
Jokes in
water-logged pockets
burst from their own
nausea.
Fun is fine--
overuse is
as the glutton
eating twenty
ham-on-ryes.
Indulgence
is a norm,
only each time
as it is in
practice . . .
a piece of a
heart dies.

****

W. A. Kahle

CHRISTMAS ON ICE (DECEMBER CHILL)

December chill--
the ice in the windowpanes,
as the same in my cocktail,
brings wonder of why frost--
cold, numbing, is so lovely.
The tinsel on my tree
splattering reflections of sharp
silver,
reminds of crystal nights
drowned in sensual excitement.
Baubles bouncing--
ornaments dancing
on those evergreen limbs of
light--
prickle,
tease,
scents of woodsy atmosphere.

Electric colors--
flash on, flash off.
Imagery timed to micro-second rhythm . . .
a goose is roasting
in mother's oven,
the rum balls are lounging on a
bright red linen in the
hallway . . .
I taste one--while pondering
the horrific thought:
Who will have left us by next year?

****

Judy Belfield

COGNOSCENTE

When you know
that you can't know
will never know,
then you know.
This paradox,
so simple,
only seems contradictory
to those who do not know.

****

Crystalish snowflakes
trickle softly
down,
landing on a
rock-hard earth
as dead as
those cold hearts
seen on city streets.
Appearing oddly,
a nun in
black and white:
she's touching a
shoulder of this tin-
speck called a
girl--

Judy Belfield

AN IRONY

My friend calls to tell me
his mother will die today,
says he can't talk long
needs to drive to the hospital
to watch her die.
Whatever I do
reminds me now
of my friend's mother
and my friend watching
all all the
"Have a nice day's"
in the world
cannot erase it--
days are not nice;
they are filled with cruel tricks
and icy caresses.
Yet I told my friend
he has lots of reasons
to go on.

****

W. A. Kahle

VISIONS I SEE

The visions I see
bring remembrances--
something like
Grandpa's
White Lightning
guzzled too fast
to notice anything
except a cannon-
balled
effect.

Eyes in a
lonely hallway
pierce mine--
raging,
tearing,
demanding someone
or something to
produce love in
just simple manners.

emaciated to seem
gruesome
from the beauty she
was.

These sights are archaic.
Though normal now
under deprived
circumstances--
reality haunts . . .
people ceasing to
experience a shock
at the sewer
the world has
become.

****

Dawn Christman

ONE LONELY NIGHT

One lonely night
I found my god
in a bar
scarfing down Jack
by himself
the neon lights
emitted a glow
on his wiry
brown hair
made it
almost as bright
as a Florida orange.

He somehow knew I was there
turned around
exposing his
taut forearms
spoke in a gospel
Come with me
and led me
outside
down the road

The moon,
Nefertiti's nipple
was bright
the wind of
the earth glided
over it, seemed
to make it bigger
the moon was
about to burst
as we lay
under it
The gods were
our audience
judging the
wiry brown
haired candidate
for his skill
and showmanship.

Afterwards, Nefertiti
smiled in approval
and he disappeared.

****

Judy Belfield

ASTRONOMERS

Without astronomers
what are novas
or red giants
or white dwarves?
We also lose
black holes
quasars and pulsars.
Without astronomers
we lose the poetry of heaven,
are reduced
to mere stars and planets--
in themselves bases enough
on which to spin dreams,
but limited
unlike the cosmos
promising newness at every turn
which astronomers,
in their turns,
name and share.

****

Dawn Christman

THE DAWN OF TWILIGHT

Twilight moans
as night wrestles
it
out of the sky
twisting, fighting,
struggling
it slowly fades into
the cosmos
only to return
when night
tires and weakens.

****

Judy Belfield

ABSTRACTIONIST

Like Kandinsky
I splotch a powderpuff of blue
to the right of center,
add another,
this time yellow,
but a bit smaller--
a three-to-five ratio
(hinting of classicism).
Next, a thick, black line--
diagonal, of course--
then some thin ones
crisscrossing.
My product is what they call
non-objective
but they're wrong:
It's me all right.

****

Dawn Christman

THEY SIT CASUALLY TALKING

They sit
casually talking
at a roadside
cafe.
Italian ices
sit on the
white metal table
melting,
from neglect.

Mimes, dressed
in clown suits
perform their
silent art
in the broad
daylight.
People gather
and watch with
glee
while the thinkers
sit at their
white metal table
on white metal chairs
and ask "What is man?"

A few feet away
amateur musicians
compete for
the crowd's attention
which makes the mimes
put on a sad face
and play silent flutes.
The crowd claps for
the noiseless song
and the thinkers
still confine themselves
and speculate "what
influences man?"

The ices have melted.
The crowd is cheering
for the street artists.
Still the thinkers
are puzzled.
The answers are all
around them.
Perhaps they should
experience and
then think.

****

W. A. Kahle

ACKNOWLEDGED

Worries were rampant yesterday
suffocating that sense of being
Incorrigible losses reigned,
smashing a circuit of life.
I'll make it--
I can take it--
but insidiously it's there;
killing the hope of freedom
from Despair.
That Devil is forever with us,
helping the scores OD on gloom--
my sonscience is impeccable
in noting the black spots,
smoldering on the edge of a memory.
I'll make it--
I can take it--
and I'll wipe the drabness all away . .
some day.

****

Jndy Belfield

AD INFINITUM

Lie still with me
in this grass bed;
let us climb stars
one after another
til we reach the topmost top
of the nightsky
in each other's eyes.
Let us not speak;
our voices do not belong
in this endless medley
of cicada lovesongs
nor can our wit
outsparkle fireflies.
Lie still with me;
to move would disturb
the silken curtains of night.
Let us breathe our dreams
into the warm air
where they will remain
long after we've gone.

****

W. A. Kahle

POST SCRIPT

A white envelope
carrying new mercy
floated through the states
to reach my fingers.
Her harried description
of loves that are lost
enshrined a fear-filled conscience.
After the help me, aid me plea
the decisions upon personal dramas:
I need.
. . .I acknowledged her voice
while reading, always looking,
toward the wrenching post script--
a memento to erase:
"I die after mailing."

****

Judy Belfield

TRANSITIONS

They were a tight little group--Pinky and Carol, Eddie and Jody. They had been drawn together during the early years of grade school, so that by the time they reached the upper grades, the friendship had been cemented together solidly.

Pinky and Jody became friends because both walked home from school the same way. They lived on the same street, a block separating their houses.

Carol walked home the same way, but after Pinky and Jody turned off on their street, Carol had another six or seven blocks to go. Eddie didn't walk home at all; he took the school bus. It wouldn't have mattered where he lived--Jody was drawn to him within the first month she started school at St. Michael's. Pinky, Carol, Eddie and Jody were "bad" kids, were always getting into trouble one way or another. "Bad," then, meant not conforming in the ways that all "good" Catholic children were supposed to, like adhering to the silence rule as they got in line to enter the school building two by two. It meant being devout and attentive at daily Mass. It meant not wasting time during class with such "foolishness" as drawing pictures or daydreaming. It meant keeping one's desk in order. It meant dressing modestly and grooming onesself within certain accepted codes. It meant behaving like little adults; there was no room for "horrific little rebellions" or experimentation with individuality or independence. It meant much more, of course, but it is enough to say that, although the four conformed to a certain extent, they were more often apt to forget what was expected of them, or worse yet, ignored what they had been told was correct.

Other children misbehaved, but they weren't consistently being brought to the attention of authority. Pinky, Carol, Eddie and Jody were. If there was one thing they could be counted on to do well, and regularly, it was to be bad.

Pinky, Carol, and Eddie were, more or less, expected to be bad--they weren't smart academically. At St. Michael's in the 50's, there were no slow learners or gifted children, only smart kids, dumb kids, and the kids in between. Children were seated, then, in rows that began in the first desk, first row, with the smartest kid in the class, and ended with the dumbest kid in the last desk of the last row. Kids were generally referred to as "first-rowers," or "fifth-rowers." The same class stayed together from kindergarten through eighth grade. Jody's class had sixty students, give or take a couple, through the eight years. There were always at least six rows of desks each year. "He sits in the sixth row," said everything about a particular student. Dumb kids were expected to be trouble-makers, and the dumb kids in Jody's class usually had the largest percentage of behavior problems. Jody sat in the first seat of the second row. She was an exception, but not a surprise.

Jody Boyd arrived at St. Michael's about two months into the second-grade school year. Before that time, she attended public schools. Because her divorced mother had recently married Jack, a Catholic, it was decided that Jody should go to a Catholic school. Jody's mother, Lilah, had been baptized Catholic as an infant. Lilah's mother died when she was a little girl, and a step-mother raised Lilah and her sisters in the Luteran faith. Subsequently, Lilah was married when she was eighteen by a justice of the peace. When Lilah married Jack, Jody was seven.

Jody had been baptized in a Greek Orthodox Church, had attended some "Greek School" activities for youngsters including lessons in the Greek language. When she was four, she sneaked into the Sunday School sessions a few times at the Methodist Church on the corner--she liked the singing. She also liked coloring the pictures of Jesus, and it seemed every time she sneaked into Sunday School, the children got to color pictures of Jesus.

A few weeks before entering the Catholic school, Jody was baptized Catholic, "on condition" that the Greek baptism hadn't been done properly. Baptized or not, however, the word "bastard" had been used in her presence, and there was no question as to who the "bastard" was. In the Catholic Church at that time, Catholics who were married outside the church were considered unmarried, since marriage by a judge was considered invalid. Offspring of these unions were, therefore, considered illegitimate, or "bastards." Bastard was a technical term, but Jody heard it as one of the legion of naughty words that kids weren't supposed to say. It was a "bad" word, meant something bad.

If being a bastard wasn't bad enough Jody helped establish a reputation for herself not two weeks after her arrival at St. Michael's. At the time, there were two second grades, both of which were training intensively for First Holy Communion the following May. Both classes crowded together for a short period each day for religious instruction from one of the parish priests. Jody's class was the one which traveled each day to the other second-grade classroom. Some kids had to double up in desks, a situation none seemed to mind, since they were thus able to sit close to their buddies. The only times Jody was able to double up with another

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student were when Sister Martin Clare presided over the doublings. She didn't know, or didn't care, who was buddies with whom, and arbitrarily ordered this kid to sit with that one.

On one of the days Sister hadn't done the assigning, and these were more frequent than the days she did, Jody sat alone. In the desk where she sat, Jody happened to see a white prayer book. It was filled with pretty pictures of Jesus and Mary. She slipped the prayer book into her pocket. It went with her when the traveling second grade returned to their own classroom. Maybe someone had seen her take it. Maybe, after discovering its disappearance, it was concluded Jody was the only one who had had the opportunity to take the prayer book. Whichever, Sister Martin Clare was called out of the classroom a few minutes after the children had returned. Moments later, Sister stuck her head in the door and called Jody out of the classroom. In the hall, she asked, "Did you take something out of a desk in the other second grade?"

"No," Jody answered.

"What's that in your pocket?" she asked. Not much of an attempt had been made to conceal the prayer book, which was much too thick to be hidden in Jody's rather smallish pocket. It sat there as obvious as a wart on a witch's chin.

"It's a prayer book," Jody said hesitantly.

"Is it yours?"

"No." Lying was useless at this point.

"You know," said Sister, "that it is a sin to steal things, to take things which don't belong to you, don't you, Jody?"

"Yes, Sister." Sister's face was red. The red contrasted with the stark white cap that covered her head under the wide black veil.

"I want you to take that prayer book back into Sister Cecile's classroom and give it to Louisa Frantini. I want you to tell her your'e sorry you took it."

"Yes, Sister." Jody hung her head and started toward Sister Cecile's room. When she reached the door, she looked back. Sister Martin Clare hadn't moved; she watched as Jody knocked on the door. A boy opened it.

"Yes," said Sister Cecile. Jody crossed to her desk and waited for Sister to tell her what to do next. Instead of instructing Jody about what to do, Sister Cecile said, "Well . . . what is it?"

Jody was going to have to supply her own lines. Unable to admit to stealing, she reached out with the prayer books and said, "I brought this back."

Sister Cecile pointed to the seat Jody had occupied earlier. Now, a dark-haired girl sat in it. Jody walked over to her, handed her the prayer book. "I'm sorry," she said, not looking at the girl.

"You may go back to your classroom now," said Sister Cecile.

Sister Martin Clare was still in the hall. She escorted Jody back to their room. Jody hadn't been sorry for taking the prayer book until then. As the door opened, all eyes lifted, all heads raised and turned to look. Jody was sure they all knew she was a thief. She kept her head down as she walked to her seat, kept it down after she had sat, after Sister Martin Clare had resumed the spelling lesson. After some time, Jody felt eyes staring. She looked up and over. Her eyes landed on a boy in the sixth row. Eddie was watching her. He smiled. She turned her head back to face the front of the classroom, lowered her eyes again to her desk. Eddie hadn't been laughing at her. She knew that; she sensed that the smile was friendly rather than mocking.

That was her first memory of Eddie The next was when the pictures of the Communion class came back from the photographer. Included in Communion costs was a fee for a sixteen-by-twenty photo of all the communicants. Sister Martin Clare passed one to each child. They all pored over the photos for a few minutes, picking their own faces out of the group. It didn't take Jody long to spot herself. All the faces smiled out at an audience--the girls in pretty white dresses and veils, the boys in blue suits. Then there was Jody, in the second to last tier, in profile. The photographer had snapped the picture just as she had turned sideways for some reason. Of the hundred-plus children in the photo, all were properly facing front except her.

This horror escaped no one's attention. And if there was a chance it might have, Sister Martin Clare made sure it didn't.

"Jody Boyd," she said. "You might know you'd be the only one with her head turned. You've ruined our Communion picture."

Jody lowered her head to stare at the desktop. Her eyes filled with tears, but she didn't cry. After awhile, when it seemed safe to look up, she felt those eyes on her again. She glanced over at Eddie, who was smiling that smile.

It was wrong for him to do this; no other children made any efforts to be friendly to Jody. In fact, they shunned her. First, she was the new kid who came from that strangest of all places, the public school system, which everyone knew turned out Protestants (or worse) who were never going to get to heaven. Then, as if to confirm their first impressions of her, she had proven to be a thief. And now, she ruined the Communion picture. Nobody ever talked to her before; now they made a point of avoiding her.

Jody might have played with Eddie at recess, but the boys were separated from the girls on the playground. As a result, she spent most recesses in

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the girls' washroom sitting on a toilet in one or another of the stalls with the door closed and locked. It had to look like she was using the toilet, because the nuns patrolled the washrooms and regularly shooed out loiterers. Jody sat, and spent the time creating friends to talk to. She talked aloud unless she heard anyone in the washroom. Sometimes she made up stories. Or sang.

Occasionally, Jody got caught in the washroom and was sent outdoors. Sometimes, she went out voluntarily. She'd walk around the knots of girls at play, stand on the edge of a group and watch for awhile, then move to another. Then, she might hop on the merry-go-round and act like she belonged. She'd watch the other girls, and laugh when they did. She might slide down the sliding board a couple of times, or climb the monkey bars. But there was nobody to say "Watch this" to, nobody to catch her as she came sliding down the sliding board and then laugh with. She never got to play on the teeter-totters because they required two kids to make them work. She watched other pairs of girls work them. Then, she would end up back in the washroom.

One day, a couple of third-graders invited her to play with them. Either they didn't know she was the thief who ruined the Communion picture, or they didn't care. She played with these girls for about a week, making more third-grade friends through them as the week progressed. She was delighted. Finally, someone had accepted her. Then it was Sister Martin Clare's turn for playground duty. She saw Jody playing with the third-graders, and grabbed her by the collar in the middle of a Crack-the-Whip.

"Jody Boyd, why are you playing with third-graders? You should be playing with the girls in your own class."

"They won't play with me."

"Don't be silly. Of course they'll play with you. Just go ask. I don't want to see you playing with third-graders any more."

She walked through the playground looking for groups of second-graders, and finally found one that looked approachable.

"Can I play with you?" she asked Susan Spencer.

"No," said Susan Spencer without hesitation.

Moments later, Susan was running off with a cluster of girls around her. She was crying and holding her face. The other little girls in the group were attending her like nurses in an emergency room. Jody had delivered a sharp slap to Susan's left cheek.

The bell had rung and recess was over. The kids were marching into the building two by two, through the foyer and up the stairs. In the middle of the stairs, Jody was pulled out of line.

"Did you slap Susan Spencer across the face?" asked Sister Martin Clare.

"Yes."

Crack! A white, long-fingered hand swung through the air, of dark brown sleeve rippling in its wake. The hand landed on Jody's cheek. It was the first time she'd ever been struck on the face. It was not only painful, but humiliating, a degradation so acute she didn't think she could bear it. Jody spent the rest of the afternoon crying at her desk.

Fortunately, the school year was almost at an end. A few more days, and summer vacation would free her. That summer, she started playing with Pinky. Pinky was a year older than Jody, but Jody's mother didn't seem to care. Pinky should have been going into the fourth grade the next fall, but she had flunked. Jody would have a friend next school-year. God had blessed her.

He hadn't, really. He'd only sent her a partner in crime. Pinky was another "bad" girl, but now there were two of them--safety in numbers, or at least company for the misery that was to follow.

In third grade, Pinky and Jody did cartwheels on the playground. They were wearing dresses. They had to stay after school and write, a hundred times, a paragraph about what kind of behavior was modest and ladylike. They stayed after school several times to write what seemed like thousands of sentences like, "I must not talk in line," or "I must not talk in church," or "I must pay attention in class." On desk-inspection day, Pinky and Jody were singled out for having the messiest desks in the history of the school. To their twosome was added Eddie and Carol. Now they were four--thrown together by a common trait of sloppiness. The four stayed after school to clean out their desks. Staying after school was supposed to be punishment, but for them, it was an excuse to have fun. They were given an hour to clean out the desks, at the end of which time, Sister Alexis, the third-grade teacher, would return to see that the job was done. Unsupervised they spent the bulk of the hour doubled over in attacks of laughter brought on by silly antics. They did get the desks cleaned, although none of them could say how this was accomplished. Eddie had to take the late bus home, a bus that regularly picked up students who had to stay after school for one thing or another. Pinky, Carol, and Jody walked home. Carol, prior to this time, had been walking home another way, a route which was more reasonable for her, because it was the most direct one to her house. After that day, however, she walked home Pinky and Jody's way. This meant that Carol had to go a few blocks in the wrong direction, and then double back back after the other girls

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had turned off on their street.

In fourth grade, the three girls had discovered several new routes home, including one which necessitated their having to climb a train viaduct over a busy street. It was a double track overpass with very little walking space on either side of the tracks. They never thought of danger, only adventure. The adventure ended one Monday after somebody reported them to the school. As they stood in front of their class, they were apprised of the danger involved. And, of course, Sister Lucinda didn't fail to mention that climbing viaducts in dresses was most immodest. Eddie smiled at Jody. Jody smiled back. Sister Lucinda, not missing a thing, asked, "What's so funny?" grabbed Eddie by the scruff of the neck, and brought him to the front of the class with the girls. The four stayed after school together again. In addition to the usual talking in line or in church, the girls were chastised regularly for a neverending stream of other sins, including stealing flowers out of peoples' yards on the way to or from school, and writing graffiti on walls with chalk.

On one of the routes home, the girls had to pass an office building. The front of the building was brick to their waists and window from there up. In the window, facing the street, sat a man at a desk who was the funniest looking person any of the girls had ever seen. He was quite thin and small, wore wire-rimmed glasses, had rather thick lips, and wore his hair parted in the middle and slicked back. At first, the girls walked past the window and made fish-lips at him. Later, they would crawl along the ground and pop up suddenly in the window fish-lipping with finger-glasses. The man would look up and show surprise, but never seemed to be angry The girls weren't reported.

They were reported, however, when they climbed the railing on the pedestrian walkway of the bridge when the bridge was up. This time, their parents were notified, and had to let the school know that the girls had been disciplined.

In fifth grade, the class graduated to the "big" playground, where boys and girls could mix at recess, although this was never encouraged. In fifth grade, also, Pinky, Carol, and Jody discovered boys and lipstick, not necessarily in that order. This was 1956, when lipstick was red, and you could buy a whole bottle of Evening In Paris or Blue Waltz perfume for less than a dollar at a dime-store. At the drugstore across the street from school, huge cherry-Cokes were a dime and big bags of Chesty potato chips were a nickel. Down the street, a little way from the drugstore, was a small restaurant, where a whole dinner-plate of French fries sold for a quarter. At lunchtime, which lasted an hour, Children weren't supposed to leave the school grounds unless they were going home for lunch. If they went home for lunch, they were supposed to walk straight home and then straight back to school. Nobody ever really said they weren't supposed to have lunch at the drugstore or the restaurant, but somehow, it was understood that these places were off-limits. That didn't bother Jody, Carol and Pinky. They spent their lunch-hours at the drugstore over Cokes or lime-phosphates, munching potato chips, and poring over the magazine rack. Often, they picked up one of the magazines that printed the lyrics to popular songs and sang the words aloud. At this time music was in a transitional period. Rock and Roll was in its infancy, was that new, "crazy, jittery music the kids liked." At the same time, more traditional sounds were equally popular A topten list for one week could include "Lisbon Antigua" by Nelson Riddle and"No, Not Much" by the Four Lads along with "The Great Pretender" by the Platters and "Heartbreak Hotel" by Elvis Presley. Pinky, Carol, and Jody sang them all.

At the restaurant, they loved the French fries, but the fries weren't what attracted the girls to the place. The owner of the restaurant resembled Errol Flynn. This was reason enough for Jody to risk being caught stealing money from her mother's purse, so she could dawdle away her lunch-hour ogling him. After which, she and Carol and Pinky would rub off their red lipstick with Kleenexes and go back to school to daydream away the rest of the afternoon about being rescued from distress by Flynn's twin. There was a constant need to invent strawberry soday or cherry Popsicle excuses for the redness of their lips. Lipstick companies got rich advertising that their brands wouldn't smear. The cheaper brands came off easier, but none was ever removed without a trace.

All this time, Jody's mother had been raising a new brood at home. She had a new baby every year, and these babies took up a lot of her time. For this reason, except for the bridge incident, she was somewhat isolated from the school. Communication between the school and Jody's mother was minimal. The only times they linked were when report cards came home. She was never upset about Jody's grades, though, because they were mostly B's, some C's, sometimes an A. The times Jody came home late from school, she made up reasons for beinglate that were less of a shock than the real resaons. Sometimes she told her mother she stayed to clean erasers; sometimes she told her she had been talking in line. She divulged some of the minor sins, but never the big ones. Her mother rarely

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questioned her.

Until fifth grade. Then, the school started having parent-teacher conferences. Early in the year, children had taken statewide aptitude tests. Jody's mother and stepfather, at their first parent-teacher conference, finally got the lowdown on her. Jody was a consummate time-waster. She was, somehow, turning her back on her talents. She was a genius, don't you know? Brilliant. Why was she working at C and B levels, when she was capable of A's? Capable, her teacher said, of skipping a grade even. Maybe, the teacher suggested, it had something to do with the company Jody was keeping.

Jody wasn't impressed by this information. School was a place where she and her friends could have fun. The work-part was only a necessary adjunct, a pesky little unavoidable hindrance, which was to be hurtled over as quickly and easily as possible, in order to get to the fun. Scholastic success was the farthest thing from Jody's mind. It showed, but still in B's and C's, so there was no cause for alarm. As long as she passed, she thought, it was enough. Jody's mother didn't think so. In fifth grade she started jumping on Jody, started trying to find reasons for her academic laziness. This year, also, Jody's mother began to take an interest in Jody's appearance.

Just as she was beginning to notice boys, just as she was beginning to experiment with her identity via clothing, her mother developed an interest in her appearance. It was the beginning of a long battle. Of course, there were times they agreed on clothing, but more often, clothing was a source of bitter arguments. Jody was a big girl in the fifth grade; she already weighed over a hundred pounds. She started wearing a brassiere that year, not because her mother was in a hurry for her to grow up, as were many mothers at the time, but because she needed one. She wasn't quite ten years old when she got her first bra; it was a B-cup. Some of the other girls were wearing bras too, but most were "training bras". Jody had her first menstrual period when she was ten and a half. She was a woman--trussed up in strappy contraptions that prevented her from playing jumprope with the same ease as she had before. As far as she was concerned, God could take all this "woman" stuff back; it interfered with playing baseball and basketball, with climbing trees and playing hopscotch. It was a "curse," just as she had over heard adult women refer to it. "I got the curse," they would say, explaining why they couldn't go swimming in the summer. As bad as it was, though, it was nothing compared to what came a short while later--cramps. Cramps that doubled her over when she woke up in the morning, cramps that made her want to beg to stay home from school, but she didn't because cramps were "natural," and "no big thing," and "not reason enough to miss school."

In fifth grade, Jody fell in love with Elvis Presley. And with Eddie. Then with Henry Rakich, a sixth-grader. Then with Ricky Nelson. Then with Eddie again. Then Alan Wolfe fell in love with her. She hated him. He was a fourth-grader, just a baby. He presented her, one day, with a copy of "Love Me Tender," a 45-rpm record. She took it home and played it til the grooves turned white. Weeks later, Alan asked her if she loved him.

"Of course not," she answered. He looked stunned. He gaped at her for a few minutes, then said, "I want my record back. You bring it tomorrow."

The next day, Jody handed it to him and said, "Indian-giver."

In sixth grade, Jody still loved Eddie---n between others that caught her eye. St. Michael's Church, at that time, got the children involved in a number of fund-raising and other activities. From time to time, they had raffles, and the kids sold chances. Offering-envelopes and church calendars went out every year. Teachers spent weeks reading thousands of names and addresses on these boxes of envelopes and calendars to each class. Children volunteered to deliver those that were in their neighborhoods. Pinky, Carol, and Jody carted home hundreds of calendars and envelopes, and took dozens of chance cards to sell. It was an opportunity to get out of their homes at night. They sold the chances and made the deliveries, but most of the time was actually spent "bumming." Bumming meant just walking the streets looking for boys, making themselves visible so the boys could find them. By this time, Pinky and Jody were already ripely developed, and Carol was in the process. Pinky's mother had allowed her to get a D. A. haircut. D. A. meant, literally, "duck's ass," which is what the style resembled on boys. But it was a unisex hairstyle with a slight variation between girls and boys. The girls' D. A. was combed back on the sides and culminated in an upturned short fluff at the back--more like a duck's tail than a duck's ass. The boys' D. A. was combed back on the sides with plenty of hair tonic, but culminated in a line at the center of the back of the head, which is where its name, "duck's ass," came from. Really daring girls wore the boys' style. D. A.'s were outlawed at most schools. They were improper and outrageous. At Catholic schools, they were also immodest. Kids who had the haircuts had to disguise them at school by combing their hair differently. Some had to disguise the haircuts at home too. Strangely, ponytails for girls were just fine.

Pinky said she had engineer boots. Carol and Jody never saw her wear them, but they believed she had them. If her

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parents would let her have a D. A., there was no doubt she had the boots. Engineer boots, at the time, were worn by "hoods," those teenagers who were causing the big problem, then, in society--juvenile delinquency. Dressing like a "hood" meant you were part of the problem. Stealing and vandalism weren't "cool" to Jody, Carol, and Pinky, but looking like a "hood" was. What all three of them wanted more than anything were black leather jackets with zippers and studs that they could wear with the collars turned up. None of them ever had one. The closest they got were black nylon windbreakers. It was close enough.

Jody had to fight to get hers, had to argue for days with her mother. It wasn't the windbreaker her mother objected to, but the color.

"Why not pink or blue?" she asked.

"Because I want black. Pinky and Carol have black ones. Why can't I?"

"I told you not to be seeing so much of Pinky and Carol, didn't I?"

Finally her mother gave in. Finally, Jody was "cool."

The girls walked the streets in their pedal-pushers or capri-pants and their black windbreakers with the collars turned up. They responded to wolf-whistles with giggling enthusiasm. They weren't talking to any of the boys yet, just walking around being appreciated. Still, this was behavior which was unacceptable; it earned a girl a reputaion; it labeled her a "tramp." Jody didn't give it much thought.

She began to when her mother did. It occurred to Jody's mother that the company Jody was keeping wasn't proper. This, of course, had been hinted at, at the parent-teacher conferences she went to, but at the time, Jody's mother thought the girls were only being rowdy, that the rambunctiousness would pass. Now, it struck her that these girls were "boy-crazy," and that meant big trouble. She had asked Jody to stop seeing so much of Pinky and Carol, to make other friends. Now, Jody's mother decided that it was time that Jody removed herself from Pinky and Carol's company altogether. For the next two years, a steady battle involving "hanging around with Pinky and Carol" raged. Jody was forbidden to walk home from school with them, forbidden to talk to them. All the "galavanting around" was going to end. Of course, it didn't, really; Jody just learned to sneak. This, she carried out successfully for quite some time, until her parents started following her in their car. The first time they caught her, she was walking home with Pinky and Carol after they'd been to Good Friday services. As usual, they lollygagged home "the long way," maximizing their time together, stretching out the time to be seen by boys. As usual, their lips were red with lipstick, their jacket collars were turned up.

"Who did you walk home with today?" Jody's mother asked when she came in the door.

"Nobody."

"Liar!" her mother shouted. "Who did you walk home with?"

"Nobody," Jody reiterated. Her mother smacked her on the shoulder, a sold, hard slap.

"Who?" she asked again.

"Pinky and Carol."

"Pinky and Carol? Pinky and Carol? Why?" She was screaming now.

"I don't know," Jody said quietly.

"What?"

"I don't know." Jody was crying. Her mother slammed her fist against Jody's back. Jody looked up. Her mother's eyes were wild. She came at her again, slapping one arm, then the other, then the face. She struck in a frenzy. Then, she grabbed Jody by the hair and dragged her to her bedroom, where she pushed her onto her bed.

"I'll teach you to sneak. I'll teach you to lie to me." She was screaming, going through the house slamming things. Jody was terrified. What if she came back into the bedroom? She usually did when she got into these rages. She usually came back with a yardstick.

"What do you think I am? Stupid?" her mother yelled. "We checked up on you. We saw who you walked home with. We saw you shaking your asses like some tramps." She yelled for quite some time slamming dishes, cupboard doors and whatever else got in her way. Jody pulled her blanket up around her, cocooning herself in a fetal knot against the bedroom wall. She kept crying long after her mother had finished yelling. Life wasn't fair. She didn't want to live. She fell asleep, was awakened by her brother, Billy, who came to tell her supper was ready.

"I'm not hungry." Billy left. He came back a few minutes later.

"Ma said to get out in the kitchen right now!"

Jody sat at the table thick-lipped and puffy-eyed. Food went down her throat in gagging lumps. Nobody talked to her. Conversation went on as usual, only she was excluded. Today, she didn't exist. After supper, she did the dishes and spent the rest of the evening in bed.

After that, she made an effort to stay away from Pinky and Carol. She told them she wasn't allowed to talk to them, that her parents had seen them "oogle-eying" the boys. She stayed away from them until things cooled down at home. She applied herself at school. But then, she was lured back. It started where it left off. Her parents caught her again and again. The scene on Good Friday repeated itself over and over. What was she to do? Pinky and Carol were her friends, and she was in love

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with Eddie. Her parents didn't know about Eddie, thank God. Eddie took the bus home. Hijinks involving Eddie only happened at school, not after. Pinky and Carol were friends with Eddie too. To separate herself from them meant cutting herself off from him too.

One Saturday afternoon, Jody went to a movie downtown. She was supposed to be meeting Mary Kay Sullivan at the theater. Of course, Mary Kay Sullivan and Jody never spoke to each other;she was really meeting Pinky and Carol and Eddie. When the movie was over, Eddie and Jody sat on a bench in a dark corner of the lobby talking. Pinky and Carol were going to stay to see the movie again.

Eddie and Jody stopped talking. He put his arm around her. It was okay because nobody could see them where they were sitting. It was the first time Eddie had touched her. She felt warrmly wonderful. They stared into each others faces for what seemed an eternity. He smiled, then moved closer. His eyes closed as his face neared. She was afraid and excited all at once. He kissed her. She tingled everywhere.

"This is a sin," Jody said.

"I know. But only a little one." He kissed her again. Now, she didn't care if it was a sin, even if it was a big one. Eddie could have done anything he wanted. Well, almost. They kissed for a long time that was over too soon. It was getting late; Jody had to get home. On the bus, she was in a daze. All the way home, she floated. Why did she have to go home?

"Who did you go to the movies with?" her mother asked when she got home.

Oh God, not again. If they saw her and Eddie, it meant death. "I told you, Mary Kay Sullivan." She knew the lie was futile. Her mother flew into another rage. This time, she whipped her with a coat hanger. In the middle of it, Jody escaped to the bathroom and locked herself in. The bathroom was the only room in their house that had a lock on the door. While her mother screamed and pounded on the door, Jody wondered how she had found out. Had she called Mary Kay? God, how embarrassing that would be. Her mother didn't say that they had followed her. Did they see her and Eddie? As her mother screamed and pounded on the door, Jody stood in the bathtub with a razor blade in her hand. She was terrified that her mother would break the door down. If she did, her rage would be compounded. Jody would have to bear the brunt of it. Eventually, she would get into the bathroom. It was inevitable. There was no way to stop her mother--except to kill herself.

Something happened than. Jody seemed to divide into parts--parts that left her body. The parts had voices. One part said, "Go ahead. Cut your wrists." Another part said, "You can't do it. You're chicken." Another part said, "Don't do it. Don't do it." The voices taunted, urged, then blurred. Before she knew what was happening, blood was spattering the bathtub. She hadn't cut her wrists; she's only sliced through four of her fingertips. The pain shook her out of the trance.

"Goddammit, if you don't open this door, I'm gonna get a hatchet and chop it down, Her mother screamed.

"Oh God," Jody thought. "If she sees this, she'll really think I'm crazy. She'll really flip." She tightened her fist on a wad of toilet paper and began rinsing out the tub.. "I'm coming," she called in a broken voice. After the blood was gone, Jody opened the door and came out. Her mother hit her a few more times with the hanger, then quit. All the pounding and yelling had taken some of the anger out of her.

When Jody woke much later, the toilet paper wad in her hand had turned brown on the edges and was stuck to her fingers. There was a spot on her sheet the size of a silver dollar. She took the sheet off the bed and carried it into the bathroom, where she rinsed out the spot with cold water. She took a cold washcloth to the bedroom and dabbed at the mattress. Then, she put on a clean sheet, lay back down, and fell asleep again.

Jody stayed away from Pinky and Carol for quite a while after that. It meant, also, staying away from Eddie a lot. That hurt, but her fingers kept reminding her. They hurt for weeks. Even so, the separation didn't last.

The girls had been friends for a long time, and had gone through so much together. It was hard to break things off. And now that something new had developed between Eddie and Jody, it was, she thought, impossible. But she was tired too, tired of fighting, tired of being whipped, tired of lying. By now, she was in seventh grade. Soon, the girls would be going their separate ways to high school anyway--Pinky and Carol were going to the public high school and Jody would be going to the Catholic one. Jody wasn't in a hurry to make the break. She drifted back to Pinky and Carol again. It was the end of March, and their class was rehearsing for the school's annual Spring Play. Jody was the lead because she had one of the loudest voices in the class. She was to play the mother of two children in a play based on "The Night Before Christmas." "Christmas" had been changed to "Easter." Another loudmouth, Kenny Miles, played the father. Pinky, Carol, and Eddie were in the chorus. One day, Eddie and Jody were sitting together fooling off, making faces at the kids on stage and snickering behind Sister Irwin's back. Kenny Miles was tucking his make-believe children into bed. Jody stopped making faces with Eddie for awhile to watch.

(continued)

It suddenly hit her that Kenny had grown some shoulders and that those shoulders appealed to her. It wasn't long after that, that she was in love with Kenny. Kenny sat in the second row; he was one of the "smart" kids. In order to maximize contact with him, Jody would need to get friendly with some of the smart kids. She started with Rosemary Preston, the smartest girl in the class. She sat in the first seat of the first row, directly across from Jody. Since Pink and Carol and Eddie were in the fifth and sixth rows, Jody's head had always been turned in their direction. Contact with Rosemary Preston had been almost nil. She started talking to Rosemary, but only when it was permitted to talk. Rosemary never talked when she wasn't supposed to. Talking to Rosemary led to talking to Joanne Gershom, who sat in the third seat, first row. This, in turn, led to talking to other smart girls. In a short time, Jody was accepted by them. They began inviting her to parties. They talked about Jimmy Clanton and Fabian, and the cute boys in their class. Now, Jody even talked to Susan Spencer, went to baseball games with her. It had been so easy. Of course, they weren't close friends yet, and Jody wasn't completely comfortable with them, but it was a start. These girls were fun too, but fun in a different way. These girls did homework together; they didn't "bum around." But they were just as interested in boys and rock and roll as she was. Jody had to watch herself in the beginning, had to be careful with her language. She had grown used to using such words as "damn" "hell," and "shit." She didn't think these girls used those words, but as she got to know them better, she found out that they, too, said them from time to time. How could she have been so oblivious all this time? These girls were, really, just like her.

She still walked home with Pinky and Carol, but only when they went the "short way." Since Carol was nuts about a boy who lived on one of the streets included in "the long way," walking home with them became less and less frequent.

Then, seventh grade was over, and Jody didn't see Pinky or Carol through the summer. When they got back to school in the fall, Jody found she hadn't missed them. She had been too busy with picnics and swimming parties with Rosemary or Joanne, or one of the other smart girls. Jody discovered she hadn't missed Eddie either, until she saw him again, and then felt an uncomfortable twinge. But Kenny Miles' shoulders were even bigger, and he had grown quite tall. He was gorgeous. He never knew Jody had a crush on him, or if he did, if some blab bermouth had told him, he never let on.

At a hayrack ride that September with all her smart friends, Dc Palumbo asked Jody why she had e spent any time with "those girls."

"Yeah," said Betty Lambert "You'r not at all like them. You're better than they are."

"I don't know what you talked abou with them."

Jody felt a sudden soft pang in her stomach. She didn't think she was better than Pinky or Carol. And she was a lot like them. In fact, Pinky and Carol were a lot like the smart girls too, but neither side would probably ever know it.

"They were my friends," she said. "We had fun together. I won't have you talk about them. I don't care if that makes you mad or not. The were my friends."

Nobody ever mentioned Pinky or Car to Jody again.

One day, at recess, Eddie stood next to Jody. "I guess you don't love me any more," he whispered.

"I guess I don't," Jody said, "but I'll always like you a whole lot. We'r friends, aren't we?"

"Yeah," he said. "We're friends." He grabbed her hand and squeez it. They both looked around to see if anybody was watching.

A while later, Jody got b es on her teeth. One day at recess time, she had to use the bathroom. As she entered the girls' washroom, she saw Pinky and Carol comparing pettislips. She smiled at them, forgetting about the braces.

"What's that stuff in your mouth, girl?" asked Pinky.

"God, you look awful," said Carol, and they both laughed so hard, Carol al most fell into one of the toilets.

"Well, at least I won't look like Bugs Bunny when I get them off. Like you," Jody said to Carol, and left the washroom.

They were never my friends, she thought. Friends don't make fun of eac other. In class that afternoon, Carol was poking Eddie and pointing towar Jody. She and Pinky giggled. Jody looke over at Eddie. He wasn't laughing. She smiled wide so he could see the metal. He smiled back, the sa e friendl smile he had given her in secor grade.

"No Matter what," she thought, "I'll always love you, Eddie."

****

Anonymous

START YOUR ENGINES

One of my favorite memories is that of warm summer days spent racing motocross motorcycles through the woods. Every weekend, my friends and I would trundle our machines down to the woods behind my parents' home in Lemont, Illinois. We had carved a rough track through the great oaks and bush pines.

The sun would trickle through the foliage, warming the brown earth and creating an almost magical light show as it bounced off the still dew-covered leaves and grass. We would pause as we entered the woods to get our bearings and decide who would ride the track first.

Every detail of the track is etched in my mind. Sliding my leg across the seat of my 250 cc Yamaha, I would vigoroursly kick the starter. The machine would roar into life, and I would be off. Across a small clearing I would race only to be swallowed up by the woods on the other side. The trail, barely discernible at this point, would soon widen into a soft, leaf and pine-needle covered path.

Man and machine seemed to blend together, floating effortlessly together. Time seemed to stand still, and although moving at great speed, it was possible to reflect on the smallest details of the surrounding scenery. Down the first hill I would race, front wheel barely on the ground. At the bottom, stones and gravel from a dried-up creek would provide tricky passage. A sharp right turn, and I would be climbing up [illegible] away the rear tire throwing a rooster-tail of dust as I powered my bike into a series of hairpin turns.

Branches of trees and an occasional stray bush whipped my arms and legs as I roared along. Behind my helmet, I would laugh, the stinging pain only heightening the sensation of power I felt.

Out of the turns I flew, engine screaming combining with its heat and that of the sun on my back to warm my body. A long, straight stretch of trail lay ahead, the trees on either side intermingling above to give the effect of a long tunnel. Down this living corridor I would fly, the multicolored leaves and flowers blurring into one.

Standing hard on the brakes I would drop down a small hill, and splash through a creek. The cold water shocked me back to my senses and I would throttle back as I crested the hill only to find my friends waiting from where I started.

Shutting off the engine, I would sit, listening to the pops and ticks as the bike cooled off, and reflect on the thrill and beauty of the ride. Often still, by closing my eyes and letting my mind wander, I conjure images of those happy summer mornings.

****

Judy Belfield

CYCLIST

She says Death is a cyclist
whizzing by on a ten-speed
with a finger crooked
in a come-hither gesture;
that most people
see only a blur of color
and miss the invitation.
She says Death
has sped past her
at regular intervals,
that it has its own
biological clock
and that one day,
when the road is dry
and grass bites its shoulders
with fierce April teeth
she will grab Death's hand
and try to run alongside.

****

Dawn Christman

INVASION

Silence encompasses
like a stratus cloud
rolls over the sky
turns its back
to the sun
and hovers
over the earth
Absence of light
hides earth's beauty
interjects the mysteries
of the night
and chirping birds
cease

****

Dawn Christman

MUSTY AIR

Musty air
clings to the bark
of the hundred-foot trees
At the bottom of the canyon
dust winds
swirl my hair
make it whip
against your chestnut
colored skin

Duck into a cave
for shelter
only to be threatened
by moss and vines
climbing down my
bare back

Insane melodies
come rushing forth
from the back
of the cave
in Poe's mind

Flashes of hell
spin across the wall
and reflect
on your face
then mine

Fantasy
or fury?

The shadows
of hell
on the wall
reflect
your fate

But is it
your true
reality?

****

Dawn Christman

TERRIBLY ABRUPT

Terribly abrupt
hate
filled her
lingered, slept,
made a nest
in her body
sucked every vein
dry
of love and care
forced her to submit
to evil--or unpopular--means
corrupted the world
with frenzied smiles
and wicked suggestions

And she liked it
for no reason at all.

****

Judy Belfield

ACID REIGN

Would you condescend
to send a short, sharp word
down your regal nose?
Say it to me
without attention;
I don't ask much,
only that you
vibrate those cords
for a second.
You don't have to think--
least of all, of me--
just operate mechanically.
I know your ears
are like a dog's--
keyed to a certain lofty pitch,
except, unlike a dog,
you don't hear anything
beneath it.
Still, I find myself asking,
making noises in your silence-
maybe if I jump arouhd a bit
or wave my arms
but then
your dignity would be offended
and I, humble I,
shouldn't like to be the one
to cause you embarrassment.
But I will keep talking
and maybe one day
the river of my biddings
will begin to etch a canyon.
Until then, the world cannot be blessed
with too many like you
or too few like me.

****

Judy Belfield

ENTRAPMENT

Between inhale
and exhale,
in the mid-spring of a cat,
time skulks.
In the tension
of a trigger finger,
in the last traces
of a passing perfumr,
on the snap-sound
of a breaking cracker
time crouches.

We cannot wait
for the breathing out
or the slash of claws;
we must undo tight fists
devour fragrances
and kiss crisp sounds
if we are to snare time--
reverse the game

****

Deborah Adams

SILENT WAR

It was a very cold day for being only October, Brian thought as he pulled the collar of his worn wool trenchcoat up around his neck and hurried down the street. The factory was only eight blocks from his three-room apartment. It was a pretty gloomy day, Brian noticed. A pretty gloomy day, just as every day had become since he'd been back from Nam. Nothing was the same naymore. Nam was six years ago and still Brian felt the pain as if it were just yesterday. Still he lay awake night after night thinking about, reliving, each crushing moment he spent over there.

As he approached the large, run-down building, he wondered why he bothered coming here day after day. What was it all for? In fact, what were even his reasons for living? He had nobody. No past. No future. Nothing. He just lived in a world of his own. Get up, go to work, go home, go to bed, get up, go to work . . .

"Hey Brian. How are ya!"

"Oh, George . . . hi. I'm okay," Brian answered flatly, not stopping to talk.

George ran over to Brian and followed alongside, not saying a word, but making sure each step he made matched Brian's. Each punched in and took his position on the assembly line. The hours dragged on and on, as Brian drilled a hole for a lug nut, drilled a hole for a lug nut, drilled a hole for a lug nut . . .

"Hey, what in the hell is that jerk doing down there?" yelled a guy working a little further down the line. "That guy George has got to go. That moron can't do anything right. He's letting half the rims go right past him. Hey, you fool! Hurry it up before we call the foreman over here. What do you think this is?"

"Hey, Pete, cool it. Just ignore the jerk before you get in trouble. He won't last long here anyway. That's why I do. I just ignore jerks," his buddy, Joe, yelled as he looked down at George.

"Hey, Brian, why don't you slap that guy upside the head and wake him up? Don't it bother you to work next to such a retard?" Pete yelled.

"NO," Brian answered as if to tell the guy to go straight to hell. "Leave him alone."

"Hey, you stupid pansy. Can't you defend yourself? What a fool to stand there and take that. What, isn't your momma around to stick up for you? If I was a wimp like you, I'd hang it up," another guy yelled at George.

All the guys were laughing now. It was a really funny joke. Brian looked over at George. He was shaking, but he kept on drilling, trying to force back the tear that formed in his left eye.

"George, are you okay?" Brian asked. "Don't let those idiots bother you. You're doing okay."

"Look at him. He's shaking. Ha! The poor baby," Pete screamed laughing to the rest of his buddies. "God! I can't take this," he added as he set down his drill and gripped his side and laughed even louder.

"Why don't you just shut your big mouth?" Brian stated firmly and the look in his evil green eyes showed that he meant what he said.

"What are you, his big brother?" Pete asked, still laughing. "You just better mind your own business, punk."

Brian set his drill down and pulled his safety glasses off of his face. His 18--pound, 6'1" figure walked slowly over to where Pete was standing.

"What did you say?" Brian asked, stepping closer to Pete. His breath was hot on Pete's face as he stared straight into his eyes, still coming closer.

"I said you're nothing but scum off the street." Pete spat in Brian's face.

Immediately, Brian's hands clutched Pete's throat, clutching tighter and tighter as Pete turned red. Fear filled his eyes. He struggled to set himself free from Brian's grip. His face had begun to turn blue, yet Brian gripped even tighter.

"Hey, you two! Cool it! Here comes the foreman. Hey, Brian! You're gonna kill him. Cut it out!' one of the guys yelled, pulling Brian off of Pete. "He's not worth it, Brian. Cool down, and get back over to your position before we all get fired."

Brian stood staring into Pete's face as he gasped for air. Then he slowly walked away, and returned to his position.

"What's the hold up down there?" the foreman yelled. "You guys better get on the ball or you'll all be working over until the job is finished. You got that?"

Brian shoved his hands into the pockets of his coat. Damn, it's getting cold, and the days are getting awfully short, too, he noticed. It was almost dark as he began his walk back to his rat hole. Yeah, that's what it was all right. And life wan't anything more than a rat race. Brian laughed at the thought.

Suddenly, he could hear footsteps They were faint, but coming closer. He reached down to tie his boot, pulling out a switchblade, opening it, and

(continued)

placing it in his pocket, gripping it tightly. He would give that sucker just what he deserved. He stopped. The footsteps stopped too. Turning around, Brian could see the silhouette of a large man just standing there. But he couldn't tell who it was, as darkness now filled the evening. He slowly began walking towards the figure. The figure stood frozen in the distance, and Brian continued towards it. Getting closer, he gripped the knife even tighter and clenched his teeth as a chill went up his spine.

Coming nearer, his heart beat faster and his adrenalin was pumping. As he came upon the figure, he slowly started to pull the knife easily from his pocket. One quick stab right in the chest would end it all for that low-down scag.

"Brian, is that you?" a weak, trembling voice whispered into the blackness.

It was George. His eyes pierced through the darkness and Brian began to tremble also.

"You almost became one dead man, Johnson!"

"What?"

"Never mind."

"I just wanted to thank you for . . . for sticking up for me today. Why did you do that? You don't owe me any favors," George's voice squeaked out. "I mean, nobody has ever helped me out."

"I don't know. I've been asking myself the same question. You've never done anything for me."

They walked down the street in silence.

"I don't know," Brian repeated as he kicked a rock against the curb. "Where you going, George?"

"Nowhere."

"What the hell you mean? Nowhere."

"My wife kicked me out of the house this morning. I'm going nowhere."

"Where ya gonna sleep?"

"Park, I guess."

"You can sleep at my place, if you don't mind sleeping on the floor."

"You sure you don't mind?"

"No, I don't care."

They walked along, saying nothing. Just walking and thinking.

"It's not much and I ain't got nothing to eat but Campbell;s soup," Brian said as he opened the broken door of his apartment.

A chair sat against one of the gray walls. Otherwise, the room was completely empty, except for a hot-plate over in the corner and a blanket thrown on the floor.

"How do you like my bedroom?" Brian laughed. "You'll sleep there tonight," he added, pointing to the blanket.

"What about you?"

"Oh, don't worry. I plan to sleep pretty well tonight," he said with a sly grin on his face.

George didn't understand his statement but it didn't matter anyway. He sat down on the floor, next to the one window in the whole apartment as Brian opened two cans of soup with his switchblade and placed them on the hot-plate. He went to the kitchen and pulled a bottle of whiskey out of the cabinet. After taking a big gulp, he handed it to George.

"What the hell," George muttered as he tipped the bottle up to his mouth.

The room remained totally quiet as the two men drank their soup out of the can and washed it down with Jack Daniels.

"You know, George, it's never going to get better," Brian said coldly. "Never."

George sat silently listening.

"People are crazy. Every one of them. The whole world has gone nuts." Brian laughed and took another drink of the whiskey and gave it to George. "No . . . there's no such thing as a friend. No such thing as peace. The war has been over for six years, but yet we're still fighting. Still fighting. It's a silent war, George. Oh, it doesn't make the TV screen or the newspaper. But it's worse than any war ever fought. He threw the empty bottle across the room and went to get another from the same cabinet.

"Yep. Every one of us is fighting a war inside ourselves. We're still out there on the front lines. That sucker is coming at you! Look George! He's coming faster! Faster! Oh God, George! What the hell you gonna do?" he yelled as he began to tremble. "Shoot him! Shoot him! Before he shoots you! Pull that trigger, George!

George sat speechless curled up into the corner of the room, unable to move as Brian yelled louder with fire in his eyes.

"You're going to have to pull that trigger, George! They'll kill you every time, over and over again. You got to kill them! Kill them!"

Brian collapsed to the floor crying. He crawled over to the cabinet again. Instead of another bottle, he pulled out a pistol.

"I'm gonna save myself from them, George, before they get me." He stretched out his arms and aimed carefully. "Concentrate now. Just lift that gun and concentrate."

He stood for a moment, hesitantly. Then in one quick move of his finger, pulled the trigger. George's body cringed with fear as he watched the bullet blow the soup can apart.

"There's only one way to survive in this world, George." He then pointed the gun carefully at his temple and in another quick move of his finger, pulled the trigger.

****

Judy Belfield

HEARTSORE

Mother elephants grieve
when calves are taken from them,
their aching sometimes so great
they lie down in dust
and die.
I calved you in the full moon,
nurtured the idea of you
through months of infancy.
You never grew,
just moved steadily away,
until, one night, I discovered
emptiness in your place.
Sometimes, my aching is so great
I lie in dust
and wait.

****

W. A. Kahle

SWEET ANGUISH

If I see you today
a ray of light will flood.
If I hear your voice
the vibes in these nerves will
hum.
If I breathe your fragrance
the springtime air is soncumed.

When I miss your calls
the halls of my soul groan.
When I fail to please you
my cracked dreams run over in
sorrow.
When I try to love you
hope's discovered: anticipation
excelled.
When it all goes away
we repeat the opening lines,
but for now . . . the rain.

****

Judy Belfield and Tom Madai

PUN-ISHMENT

She opunned the door and said, "This is a raid: I'm holding you for transom!" In her hand, she held a can of Arrid deodorant, ready to spray. So she did:

"Out Farther, we chart the heavens"--but that was another story. On this floor, a party began; then, seconds later, came the repartee. She said, "My name is Barbara Ian; I'm Doc Savage's niece. Nice little soiree you're having. I'm a little sore myself, but I can party any time."

The host invited her in, and handed her a bunny costume. She took it, saying, "Do you have a mirror here? My hare is bugging me, and I must reflect on it!"

"No," said the host, "but I have some wafers. Here, take one--I know how rabid you are. Hop on over here and put my Eddie Rabbitt album on the stereo. She did so after getting into costume, and he asked, "Would you carrot for some soda in your whiskers, or do you prefer it straight?"

"On the sofa," she said flatly. "I'm a pretty open person, and besides I have a crick in my neck."

"Well, let it drain in the bathrub, for heaven's sake!" he gushed. A stream of guests flowed behind them toward the bar, which was wet, of course. All the while, the stereo flooded the room with Danny and the Juniors singing, "At The Hop," followed by "Splish Splash. Conversation gurgled merrily, rising and falling until Van Helen started in on "Jump." Then Barbara and the host, whose name was Man A. Heavens, began to dance, but stopped abruptly because they felt an urge to go for't and multiply. Their figures entangled in several permutations, climaxing in exhaustion because they were both too slosh'd to go the limit, she said, "Maybe another time. Tanks for having me."

He replied, "Lettuce explore the hole issue tomorrow, at 7:00, if you don't mind."

She said, "I drink it's a waterful idea! See ya!"

****

Judy Belfield

HAUNTINGS

Ahab's arm swung forward
beckoning all to follow.
He was dead, of course,
but still able to speak.
I jumped into the sea
and grabbed the harpoon ropes;
held fast
as the whale rose in the air
then dove under again.

I thought I heard a chuckle
as the water closed over--
it may have been the eddy
swirling in wake . . .
I think not--
it was Ahab
or the whale--
we all understand each other.

****

Dawn Christman

SLOPING GREEN IRISH HILLS

Sloping green
Irish hills
speckled
with patches
of soft grass
frolicking
in the wind
sunlight
smiles
on Lady Gregory's
castle
and the members
inside
nourish
seedlings
of ideas,
Nature's
heaven
for the
Celtic revival.

****

Dawn Christman

VICTORIAN CANDLE LAMP

Victorian candle lamp
painted bluebells
on its base
stands guard
for the palace
its flame
whips
up in the air
exhausting
a yawn
will not sleep
until dawn
when daylight
comes on watch.

****

W. A. Kahle

THE PROPER TIME

Ambiguity remains as a whispering
voice,
shouting the glories of makeup for
pain.
The perfection of white lies--
cuddly or cute,
smothers alone in mythical
closets,
gasping in secrecy, the dos, the don'ts,
I said let's have a ball!
Time to unleash the roaring
tigers!
. . . but never on Sunday,
never.

****

Judy Belfield

SECRET

Lust is a pregnancy
I keep hidden from my father--
it grows with shameless speed
sucking life
through its umbilical straw,
its fingers and toes twitching
in rhythm with its heart.
Lust's eyelids, sealed shut,
flicker with amniotic dreams
while I dread the day
when my belly will swell
too large to be concealed.
Then Father will ask, "Who?"
and I will not be able to answer
because I do not know.

****

W. A. Kahle

OLD FLAME

Sunshine is filtered through her
tinted lenses
hiding those brown reservoirs
of liquid vision.
I tip my head slightly
hoarding secretly a better view.
You want me--
You need me--
and yet anticipation moans,
halted from exploring further
inside a body
illuminating pure demand.

. . . We used to lie
about kissing.
Or stretch a story like rubber
until the weak spots spread--
snapping back, increasing
humility.
. . . We used to lie
about petting,
but the redness vanished from
our necks--
as an old garment exploited too often.

Even these thoughts of our lives--
the lusty urgencies--
have flickered sickly with doubt.
If you want me--
If you need me--
take it freely and settle the score
while I scrounge to consume the truth .
remember, my love,
the yearning is present--
the fire is built--
the match is struck--
let us burn . . .

****

Dawn Christman

GRANDMA'S LACE

Little girl
in grandma's
hat and high heels
  parades down the staircase
in a fashion show
for Mother's friends
Old crinkled lace
once white
now sooty and stiff
skims her brow
The ladies initiate smiles
retouch their own laces
perfectly white
soon she will be old enough
to wear her own perfect
white lace
and socialize
while watching someone's
little girl parade
in a fashion show.

****

Shelbia Chandler

WHITER THAN WHITE

The chair rocked slightly as I sat forward wiping sweaty palms on my blue jeans. The gray head was still bent over the pages, but she was almost finished. I was imagining the worst when she closed the Wordeater and set it aside.

"Now, Shelbia, you're my oldest granddaughter and I love you, but I have to be honest. You're a talented young lady. Your stories are interesting, but why can't you be like that nice Judy Belfield or Dawn Christman?"

"What do you mean, Grandma?" I asked.

"Well, you know I hate swearing in young people. Judy and Dawn wrote such nice clean stories. They were interesting stories without all the nasty talk."

"But, Grandma," I interrupted.

"Don't 'But Grandma' me. You're such a quiet little thing. You sit around not saying diddley squat. People bawl you out and you just sit there, but let somebody give you a pencil and say, 'write a story.' Before they can add 'boo,' you've turned out pages of filthy words!"

I sat open-mouthed and staring. Since I wasn't sure what to say, I wiped my palms again.

"Is there something wrong with your mind?" she asked.

"No, Grandma, it's just that . . ."

"Uh-uh," she said, "Don't sit there and tell me all your friends talk like that. I've read your classmates' work. Yours stands out as much nastier."

Dawn Christman

ON THE TABLE IN THE PARLOR

On the table
in the parlor
sits a tin
of Fanny Mae's
hard candies--
the elegance
of life.
Next to the
crinkled photographs
of grandma and me,
I rest
on a faded blue chair
breathing in
the musty breath of time
slim fingers
grapple through the
potpourri of colors
finally choosing
the white--no--
the yellow

I ponder the chosen,
look at the rotund middle--
stuffed with
class,
slip it gracefully
into my mouth,
experience
the ecstasy
as my mother did
years ago.

****

"But, Grandma, my teacher said . . ."

"Your teacher said," she imitated. "I'm surprised he didn't flunk you. His name is Stobart? He must be a young punk fresh out of college if he lets you get away with that. He's definitely not old."

"No," I replied, "he's not a young punk. He's been teaching for more than twenty years. He told us that bad words are only bad when we use them just to be using them. If we use them, we're supposed to do it constructively.'

"Constructively, my eye," she snorted, "but I'm no teacher, so I'll leave that alone."

I wiped my hands again, thinking she was finished. She leaned back in the chair, folded her arms, and continued.

"The other thing that I don't understand is why you have to advertise your blackness."

"I didn't think I was," I told her.

"Well, just look at this," she said picking up the Wordeater, and thrusting it toward me.

"I've seen it, Grandma," I told her somewhat impatiently. "I've read

(continued)

it many times, and I wrote it. I know what it says."

"I'm trying to make my points," she replied dropping the paper in my lap. "I know you're black, you know it, your teacher knows it, your friends know it. So, why does your story have to flaunt it?"

I stared at her puzzled.

"Your writing is so full of black expressions and bad grammar. Why do you have to write like that? You don't talk like that. You've always gotten A's in grammar. If you ask me, you're not giving your stories your best."

"I don't see it that way, Gram," I said, getting up and reseating myself at her feet. "See, "Mind Games" isn't about me. It's about people who are black. Like a lot of blacks, they don't always speak correctly. But they do make an effort

"I could have made the characters talk white, but I think I would have lost an element of the story. People don't want to read about characters who are all like themselves. My characters stand out because they are different from the average reader. The grammar and language are part of this difference. Maybe I didn't do a perfect job writing this story, but I used to think I couldn't do it at all."

"I remember," she nodded.

"In my writing class, I've learned that I can write short stories and make them interesting. Grandma, with a little practice and time, who knows? I could be famous."

"Now, <u>that</u> I never doubted," said Grandma, running her fingers through my hair. "I'm not sure I agree with all the fancy learning you're getting, but I know you'll make it. As I've said, you're talented. I have complete faith in your abilities, even if I question your methods. It's hard to remember sometimes that those helpless little girls and boys grow up and develop minds of their own."

We watched each other for a long moment, then she said, hugging me, "For the record, Shelbia, even with all my objections, Grandma really did like your story."

I smiled through a glimmer of tears and returned her hug. Then I sat back, already thinking of my next story.

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Dawn Christman

MARSHMALLOWS HANG

Marshmallows hang on the stem
of a tree ripe waiting to be plucked
I touch one smooth, yet sharp
like beveled glass
Yank it from its cord, analyze it
a worm hole on the bottom!
I throw it to the ground
The stranger smiles
Look for another
Aaah! perfect
Almost in my mouth
The stranger grabs my hand.
Don't eat it. It's evil he says
Temptation wraps itself around the white
skin
seeps into the core with embryos unknown
Defying him, I take a bite.
luscious, thick
cream foams in my mouth
exquisite.

Doomed.
For all mankind.

****

Judy Belfield

FULL CIRCLE

After hairy beginnings
animal became something more--
how was it that the change occurred
or was it only a mind
which created the concept,
brought itself up to a level above beast'
Then, to the caves--recording the hunt
leaving hand-signatures
for what reason we may never know,
but the details are as fine
as Titian's skin tones
and we cannot feel too removed
from Paleolithic man . . .
It is only a small step backward
from human to hominoid;
another and another and we arrive
Is it, therefore, reasonable to separate
ourselves from All? Or must we consider
yesterday and tomorrow
microscopic and macrospace,
a single unit to which all things
contribute the necessity of their
existence in equal measure?

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Judy Belfield

RITES

One New Year's Eve
The car crashed through
Woolworth's plate-glass window
While we were in church
Singing Hosannahs
Your blood flowed hot
On the frosty street

We praised God
Asked for blessings
For the new year
Stepped out into a new decade
And there you were
Lying still in the street
A fireman on top
Holding you together
And in the darkness

Blonde hair glistened
On the asphalt
The hard asphalt
Sucking up your life
Praise God

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wordeater

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